Robert Englund

as Freddy

Photo: Martina Vanegas

FREDDY

IS ALIVE AND WELL!

Robert Englund has made a killing in his role of Elm Street's Freddy Krueger. He talks to Roderick Barrand and Colin Dangaard about *Nightmares*...

Robert Englund has become Hollywood's unlikeliest cult hero, an actor who has found fortune — and a good dollop of fame — playing lizards and freaks.

"Whew, nobody has been more fooled and surprised by all this than I," grins cheeky-faced Robert, who's all set to fill movie aisles again with the American release of one of those films that never win Oscars but make all the loot.

"I've been in movies with Reynolds to Fonda, you can't count all the television series I've been in. But it's taken a monster to put me on the map. And darn it, you can't even see my face."

Englund is talking about his picture *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. It could just as easily have been named after the U.S. Mint. This, you see, is the third of a trilogy of teenage killer-thrillers that has Robert and his friends laughing all the way to the bank. Englund has been churning out these scary sagas of a burnt-to-a-frazzle child killer called Freddy Krueger at the rate of nearly one a year. If you haven't heard of the *Nightmare* movies yet, chances are the last pictures you saw wasn't a talkie.

A few surprising facts:

They spent $1.3 million to make the first *Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984. It made $24 million. **Profit!**

Nightmare's producers were rich, delirious... and cautious. They made a sequel, still kept the budget under $2 million — and pocketed $30 million in profits just from theatres.

When they released the first two movies to the video set, pre-sale orders in the US alone climbed to 300,000 units, a record.

This was like spending a peanut to buy the tree. *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* be darned, here was a way to **really** make the movies pay big. At a time when most films cost upwards of $20 million to make — with many doubling that figure — then needing triple box office receipts simply to cover advertising and distribution expenses (which many don't), the tight-stringed *Nightmare* crew have proved the canniest of all.

"I give you my word *Nightmare 3* is special," says Englund, 36, who plays the hideous Freddy Krueger, but whom television viewers are more likely to remember from the sci-fi series *V* as Willie, the alien lizard who refused to eat mice and men. He chuckles. "It's not just because of our whopping budget that it is the best *Nightmare* yet — though we did spend $4.8 million. Everything in the script ended up on celluloid. This film will really get your pacemaker ticking."

To recap the story so far:—

Terrible Freddy was lynched and burned by angry townsfolk for being an awful rotter with the kids at the Elm Street school where he was janitor. Actually, he killed one of them. Freddy didn't stay dead for long however. He came back — steel claws, burnt face and all — to commit mayhem and murder on the Elm Street crowd through the nightmares of a pretty little lass named Nancy Thompson, played by Heather Langenkamp. Heather is back in part three, though she's a teacher now. This time dastardly Freddy manages to do his ghastly hunting in the dreams of a hospital full of kids, descendant of the parents who'd meted out vigtilante justice years before. By the time Freddy is finished there aren't many residents of Elm Street left standing, or, in this case, sleeping.

Robert Englund has a tough time holding back his glee. The way he plays Freddy Krueger is as a maniac who mixes humour with his killing. "Wes Craven is mining the potential of all those boogie men stories parents have used to keep their kids in line," he says, trying to explain *Nightmare's* success. "Here's Freddy, who never made it all the way to hell, living this satanic, purgatory, half-way existence and attacking these kids in their dreams. he's in their bedrooms attacking adolescents, mainly girls, violating the space that is most private of all, the mind. That's an inherently scary, creepy, idea. Everyone who has ever had a nightmare knows there is no control, it's the ultimate in helplessness."

What wasn't quite so terrific, however, was the four hours of tedium and distress that daily went into changing mild-mannered Robert Englund into ghastly Freddy Krueger. Englund found himself spending up to 17 hours a day in his rubber, disfigured face. Getting it off again with solvents and gauze was a lot like scraping paint off. Kevin Yagher, a 24 year-old who used to run a mask business in Ohio, designed Freddy's face. Kevin made it from 11 pieces of latex, each carefully painted to simulate festering burn injuries, then separately glued to Englund's skin.

Englund was impressed. "I'd sit there watching the transition in the mirror," he says. "My whole personality would change as the mask went on. By the time they had finished Robert Englund was gone. I'd feel as cantankerous as Freddy."

With the *Nightmare* movies making money hand over fist, Englund has found his own paychecks have soared too. He and his live-in girlfriend of three years, actress Roxanne Rogers (younger sister of actor Sam Shepherd), have bought a new Beverly Hills home and are talking marriage.

"Suddenly I'm a cult hero," says Robert happily. "I marched in New York's Greenwich Village Halloween Parade last year and all hell broke loose. It seems everyone is a Freddy Krueger fan. There's a heavy metal rock band out with a ballad to Freddy, kids in Yugoslavia are telling Krueger jokes, even in India there's a newspaper calling him 'a contemporary manifestation of a traditional evil spirit'. And just think — I only did the first film as a lark!"

Robert Conrad's fist slams into the heavy punch bag and his hair sprays sweat. If that had been Sylvester Stallone's midriff instead of 200lbs of quivering leather and kapok, Sly would have a devil of a stomach ache by now.

Bob Conrad has been thinking a lot about punching Stallone while he rattles the windows in this gym of his, in the basement of his towering mountain home in the heart of California's High Sierras. There's a move afoot to put them in the same boxing ring together. Not for a movie, mind you, but for loot, the real thing. Fifteen million bucks to be exact.

It started innocently enough. "The subject came up during a dinner I was having with a Los Angeles sportscaster who knew of my passion for boxing," says Conrad, during one of his rare at-home interviews. "He asked me how I thought I'd do against Stallone. I said I'd murder him."

Now it should be pointed out that Conrad, at the time, wasn't taking the proposal terribly seriously and was only joking — well, half-joking anyway — when he gave his answer.

But he isn't joking now. Promoters and lawyers are quietly talking. Conrad has written Stallone notes. Stallone has called and left messages at Conrad's wooden ski slope mansion. They haven't talked yet but it's getting serious. And the idea of a face-off between Rumblin' Rambo and Brawlin' Bob isn't as far fetched as it sounds.

"Stallone has built a tremendous career out of doing on screen what some of us do in real life," grunts Conrad, raking the punch bag with a vicious combination. "The bottom line is I wouldn't mind meeting him in the centre of the ring. I've seen his Rocky films, I've always wondered what this guy would be like without the cameras, without the choreography. Maybe now's my chance to find out."

Conrad, to be fair, doesn't want this thing to get out of hand and wonders aloud whether he should be discussing it at all. He doesn't want to sound like he's goading Stallone or throwing down the gauntlet. But when he points out this would be a glamour fight made in Hollywood — he's right. And surprisingly, most of the smart money would be on him.

This would make The Battle of the Network Stars look like a rumble at the local kindergarten. They could bill it as the Italian Stallion and Determined German, the big screen's most macho mangler against a man who built a television career — on and off the set — with his bare knuckles.

Conrad, at 51, is in superb physical condition. His arms — after countless hours pounding sparring partners and dumbells — are built like tree stumps. Imagine Popeye's and you'll get the idea.

Conrad has spent a lifetime fighting and brawling his way to the top of the Hollywood big time. He jokes that he could throw a jab before he could walk. Battery

Roderick Barrand and Colin Dangaard talk to Robert Conrad about boxing and movies . . .

commercials he did a few years ago where he "dared" viewers to "knock 'em off" his shoulder pretty much sums him up. This is a working man's actor. If he hadn't made millions breaking heads on the small screen he says he would've been a Teamsters Union boss. Back on his *Wild, Wild West* series days he did his own stunts, the more dangerous the better. On *Baa Baa Black Sheep,* another Conrad winner now in syndication as *Black Sheep Squadron,* he taught himself to fly. Conrad is known for a temper as explosive as napalm and a right hook that could deck an elephant.

Stallone on the other hand (younger than Conrad at 40 but at around 5'8" much the same height) got his muscles from pumping iron, not jumping rope. He's the highest paid actor in Hollywood, and for this fight they are talking his language.

Big time fight promoter Don King sent word to Conrad that he estimated such a bout would bring $5 million for Bob and $15 million for Sly. For Conrad, the paycheck would be icing on the cake.

"Hell, I've boxed for free, I've boxed for fun, I've done it with strangers, I've even done it in bars," he grins. "Pat Goosen, a wonderful welterweight, has asked me to go a couple of rounds and like I say, when grown men put on gloves they can lose their cool."

While Conrad is using much of this interview to discuss how he might realign another actor's face, the irony is that we are here to discuss his new television movie *One Police Plaza* in which, for a change, he doesn't throw a single punch. Conrad plays cerebral New York detective Daniel Malone in this mystery thriller based on William J. Caunitz's best seller. Conrad says with the latest rash of films about "incest, rape and AIDS" he figured "a good old fashioned crime whodunnit" will be a hit with viewers.

Conrad is one of a select group of television veterans — along with such heavyweights as James Garner, Michael Landon and Buddy Ebsen — who have remained bankable television personalities throughout careers spanning more than 30 years.

He has been in some seven series, with two — *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and *Wild, Wild West* — continuing to be enormous hits in syndication. His first series, *Hawaiian Eye* in 1958, was a crime series trend setter long before the days of *Hawaii Five-O* and *Magnum*. A new series, *High Mountain Ranger* — which will employ five of Conrad's seven children as actors and producers — begins shooting for CBS in January.

Conrad has no regrets about his career (even though he turned down juicy leads in *Dynasty* and *The A-Team*) but he says he has a few about his personal life. Take marriage. Bob's had two, but if he had to do it over again, one would have been enough. Conrad had five children by his first wife Joan whom he married at 16 in 1951. Joan was the understanding sort; while Bob played the field, she said she still loved him.

Then, eight years ago, Conrad met an 18-year-old model called Lovelda Fann. They moved in together, eventually married, and today have two girls, Kaja 3 and Camille, 15 months. A third baby is due in February.

"I'm very happily married now, I have a lovely young family, but I have mixed emotions," Bob says. "I wouldn't trade Lovelda or these kids for anything. On the other hand I was pretty happy with my wife, Joan. She's a good lady, a good mother, I still consider her my best friend."

So what went wrong the first time around? Conrad says he did. "I was married but I wasn't," he says. "I was out there doing whatever I wanted to do with whoever I wanted to do it with. Women were always more important in my life than men. I wasn't fit for any real relationship during *The Wild, Wild West* days and certainly not for years afterwards. I was swept up with the fast lane, the action, the stunts, the brawls, the boxing. It was as if acting was my hobby."

There is a sense in which that is still true. Robert Conrad remains a driven, hard-drinking, physical fitness freak with a Mount St. Helen's-sized temper.

And right now, it's Sylvester Stallone whose got his attention. "You have to understand the philosophy of a boxer, of men who have fought," he says. "It gets into your blood, it's something you never lose. Sure, nature tells you in the aging process it's time to quit, but with that in mind I always feel I can get out of the armchair and get back into the ring. If Stallone thought it would be a good contest I'd be very pleased — you might say absolutely delighted — to go a couple of rounds with him.

"I just want one more time in the ring, just for the hell of it. It doesn't even have to be Stallone. I'll take on anybody."